



**Director of
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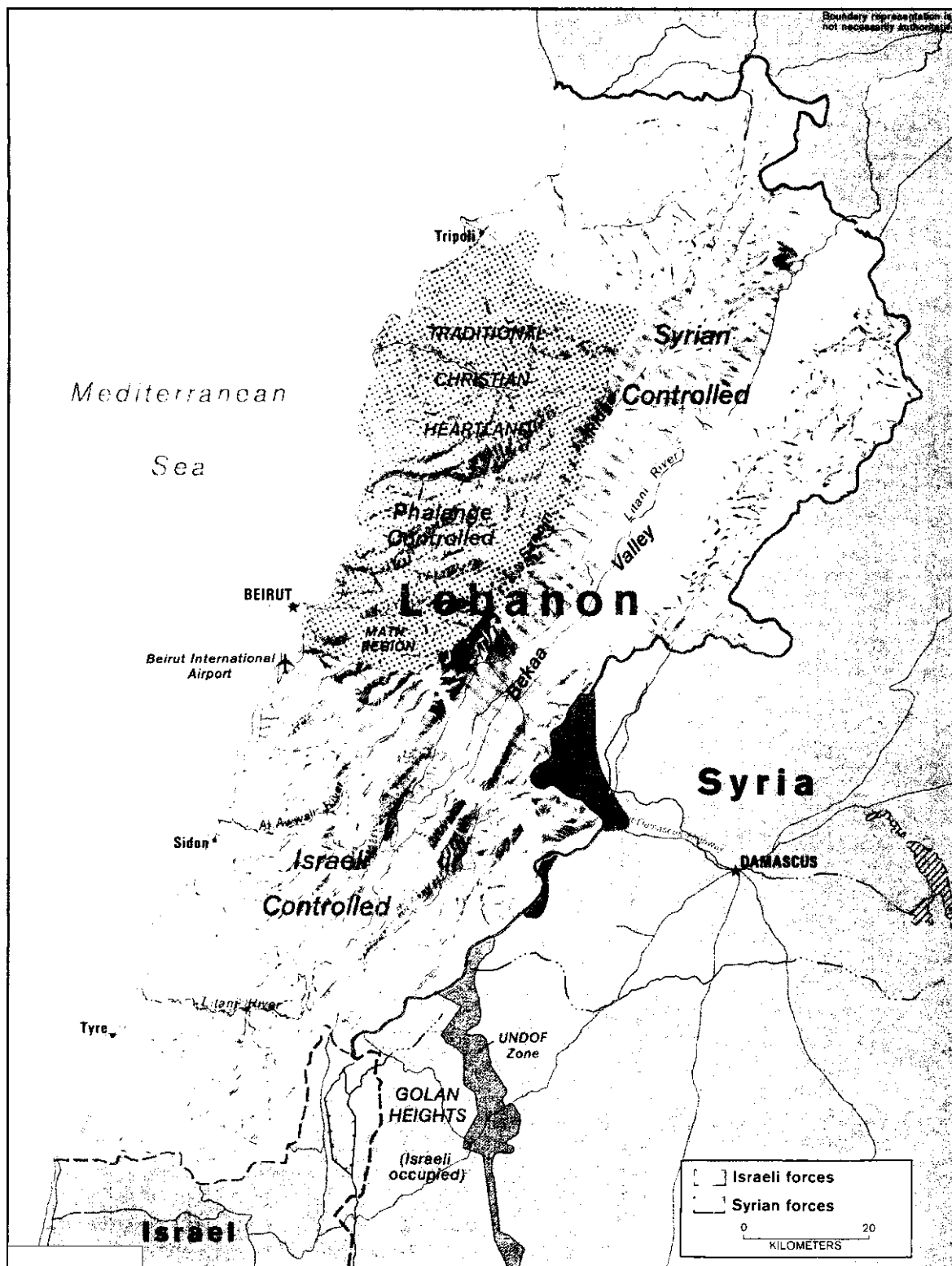
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SPECIAL ANALYSIS

(13)

ISRAEL-LEBANON: Israeli Views on the Next Phase
[redacted]

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Israeli officials, convinced that a pullout of PLO fighters from Beirut is imminent, are turning their attention to the ouster of the remaining PLO forces and the Syrians. The Israelis probably calculate Syria's poor military position and lack of Arab support, coupled with continued high-level US involvement in the negotiations, will help ensure a negotiated withdrawal. They also are likely to believe, however, that they will have to use some military pressure to achieve their objectives. [redacted]

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After the PLO fighters have left Beirut, the Israelis will focus on expelling the PLO from positions in northern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley. They believe the momentum developed during the Beirut negotiations can be carried over quickly to those forces but are prepared to use military force if necessary to secure their withdrawal.

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Tel Aviv's earlier view that a complete Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon could only be achieved at high cost and that Israel ought to be prepared to reconcile itself to a permanent Syrian presence has changed in the past month. The Israelis apparently now believe the cost of ousting the Syrians--and the remainder of the PLO--will be relatively cheap. [redacted]

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Attitudes Toward Negotiation

The Israelis recognize that vital Syrian interests are involved and that the negotiations are likely to be long and tough and could require additional military action. Nonetheless, Tel Aviv evidently believes Syrian President Assad--whom it has long regarded as the most pragmatic Arab leader--realizes his military situation is precarious and will accept a face-saving way out. This perception probably has been reinforced by Assad's decision to withdraw his forces from Beirut without a fight. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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Israel will want to use the negotiations to settle a number of outstanding issues with Damascus and will expect continued high-level US involvement. Senior Israeli officials have already indicated they plan to raise the subjects of Jewish emigration from Syria and the release of Israeli prisoners and the remains of Israelis killed in Syria. []

The Israelis probably see little danger in protracted negotiations with the Syrians. Domestic opinion remains solidly behind the government's handling of the war, and the opposition Labor Alignment is on record as endorsing the government's goal of ousting all Syrians from Lebanon. Moreover, some Israeli officials are likely to believe the continuing negotiations would help divert US attention from the broader Palestinian issue. []

Use of Military Pressure

The Israelis reportedly have increased their forces in Lebanon in the past week, probably to improve their military position against the Syrians. Israel now has about 39,000 troops in Lebanon, and its control of the air and most strategic locations leaves Syria in a difficult military situation. []

If the Israelis decide military moves are required to speed the negotiating process, they are likely to move slowly. Initially, they probably would try to oust the Syrians from positions in the Matn area east of Beirut and along the Sannin Ridge, while holding out the threat of an all-out assault against the Syrians in the Bekaa Valley. The close proximity of Syrian and Israeli forces and the strong possibility of continuing Palestinian infiltration efforts make it likely the Israelis would have ample justification for moves against the Syrians. []

Some Israeli officials, particularly Defense Minister Sharon and Chief of Staff Eytan, probably will argue that an all-out attack on the Syrians is the only way to get them out of Lebanon. These officials would like to humiliate Damascus and deal a severe blow to Syria's military capabilities. Prime Minister Begin's willingness to restrain the hawks will depend on his calculation of the US response and the likelihood of high casualties. []

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Keeping the Syrians Out

In Israel's view, a strong, Christian-dominated government in Lebanon willing to sign a mutual defense treaty with Tel Aviv would be able to keep the Syrians from reintroducing their forces into Lebanon. The Israelis will encourage the Lebanese Government to arrive at an understanding with Damascus that would protect Syria's political interests in Lebanon. [REDACTED]

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Tel Aviv, however, will seek a mutual defense treaty with Beirut. The Israelis will want to ensure that such a pact would allow them to move their forces back into Lebanon if the Syrians try to return. [REDACTED]

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